

Message Text

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H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EA-07 SAJ-01 EB-07
AID-05 DHA-02 AGRE-00 CU-02 PC-01 HEW-04 INT-05 /124 W
----- 064476 /17

R 181030Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5586
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY COTONOU
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
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AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NIAMEY 5566

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, NG
SUBJECT: TOUR D' HORIZON WITH PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE

1. PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE RECEIVED ME FOR AN HOUR
DECEMBER 15 FOR FOLLOW-UP CONVERSATION AFTER MY
PRESENTATION OF LETTERS LAST SATURDAY. HE INDICATED
THAT HE WANTED TO DISCUSS QUOTE COOPERATION UNQUOTE
WHICH HE DID, BUT IN CONTEXT OF A CANDID AND BROAD RANGING SUMMATION
OF THE LARGER CONTEXT IN WHICH HE
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SAW NIGER'S PROBLEMS, OF WHERE AFRICA IS GOING, AND
HOW SUCH DEVELOPMENTS RELATE TO RELATIONS WITH U.S.,
SOVIETS AND CHINESE. I WAS STRUCK BY THE DIRECTNESS AND
FRANKNESS OF HIS APPEAL FOR A MORE FORTHCOMING US ROLE
TOWARDS ITS FRIENDS IN AFRICA, PARTICULARLY IN THE FIELD OF
DEVELOPMENT.

2. PRESIDENT BEGAN BY TALKING OF THE DROUGHT, UNDERLINING ROLE WHICH U.S. HAD PLAYED IN ALLEVIATING ITS EFFECTS AND THEREBY PUTTING NIGER BACK ON ITS FEET. THIS HAS BEEN A GOOD HARVEST YEAR, HE SAID, ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW LONG NIGER'S GOOD FORTUNE WILL LAST OR WHAT THE CROPS WILL BE LIKE NEXT YEAR OR TWO YEARS FROM NOW. PRESIDENT MENTIONED THAT U.S. HAD DELIVERED QUOTE MORE THAN 20,000 TONS OF CEREALS UNQUOTE TO NIGER AGAIN THIS YEAR AND SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT MORE COULD BE AVAILABLE IF NEED AROSE. FOR THE MOMENT, NIGER IS ENJOYING SOMETHING AKIN TO PROSPERITY AND HAS A BREATHING SPACE FOR ASSESSING ITS PROBLEMS AND IMPLEMENTING LONGER-TERM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS. NIGER'S DEVELOPMENTAL PRIORITIES ARE CLEAR-- AGRICULTURE/LIVESTOCK, PUBLIC HEALTH, EDUCATION AND INCREASINGLY SHELTER AND HOUSING. THIS IS A TALL ORDER, EXPECIALLY IN A COUNTRY DEALING WITH LITERACY AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES OF ABOUT 10 PERCENT.

3. U.S., THE PRESIDENT CONTINUED, HAS BEEN WELL AWARE OF THESE PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMS NOW UNDERWAY TO MEET THEM ARE MOST WELCOME AND APPRECIATED. PRESIDENT SINGLED OUT NIGER CEREALS PROGRAM WHICH IS NOW GETTING OFF THE GROUND AND NIAMEY PRODUCTIVITY PROJECT TO WHICH HE ATTACHES HIGH IMPORTANCE WHICH HE HOPES WILL MOVE AHEAD SOON. NIGER WANTS ALL PROGRAMS TO BE LEAN AND EFFICIENT AND WISHES TO DISCUSS ANY PROBLEMS THAT MAY BE CONNECTED WITH THEM IN AN OPEN AND FRANK WAY. GOOD ADMINISTRATION ON NIGERIAN SIDE IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT.
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THUS HE HAD BEEN COMPELLED SEVERAL MONTHS AGO TO REMOVE NIGERIAN DIRECTOR OF NIGER CEREALS PROGRAM FOR IMPROPER USE OF FUNDS. KOUNTCHE SAID HE WOULD NOT TOLERATE ANY INDICATION THAT DEVELOPMENT RESEOURCES, ESPECIALLY THOSE COMING FROM FOREIGN DONORS, BEING USED IN IMPROPER WAY.

4. PRESIDENT GAVE EQUALLY WARM ENDORSEMENT TO PEACE CORPS ACTIVITIES. FRANKLY, HE SAID, HE IS SOMETIMES CRITICIZED ABOUT PEACE CORPS ROLE. SOME LIKE TO PAINT PEACE CORPS WITH BRUSH OF CIA. ALTHOUGH SUCH ACCUSATIONS ABSURD, PRESIDENT SAID, IT IS IMPORTANT TO APPRECIATE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN WHICH THEY ARE MADE. HE BELIEVES PEACE CORPS ACTIVITIES HIGHLY WORTHWHILE, GEARED AS THEY ARE TO EVENTUAL REPLACEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS WITH AFRICANS AND PROVIDING INDISPENSABLE SERVICES IN THE INTERIM. HE BRIEFLY REVIEWED PEACE CORPS OPERATIONS, SHOWING GOOD GRASP OF ITS ACTIVITIES HERE AND BESTOWING SPECIAL PRAISE ON PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC HEALTH AND FORESTRY. AGAIN, PRESIDENT NOTED, IF PROBLEMS AROSE ON EITHER SIDE, HE WANTED TO DISCUSS THEM OBJECTIVELY AND FRANKLY WITH ME.

5. PRESIDENT ENDORSED IDEA OF U.S. -NIGER BILATERAL TALKS ON AID AND PEACE CORPS ACTIVITIES ON REGULARIZED BASIS AND SAID NIGER ATTACHED HIGH IMPORTANCE TO NEXT ROUND COMING UP EARLY IN YEAR.

6. TURNING TO INTERNAL POLITICS, KOUNTCHE SAID THAT NIGER FOR THE MOMENT IS NOT A DEMOCRACY AND MAKES NO SPECIAL PRETENSE OF BEING ONE. POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF THE KIND THAT AROSE LAST MARCH (THE ATTEMPTED COUP) COULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO INTERFERE WITH THE MAIL DEVELOPMENT TAKS AT HAND. AT THE SAME TIME, PRESIDENT CONTINUED, NIGER HAS NO IDEOLOGICAL BENT. DESCRIPTIONS OF THIS COUNTRY AS LEFTIS, RIGHTIST,CENTERIST, OUT IN FRONT OR FOLLOWING BEHIND ANY IDEOLOGICAL MOVEMENT ARE PURE QUOTE FOLKLORE UNQUOTE. BASIS OF NIGER'S
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POLITICS IS THE DIGNITY AND SELF-RESPECT OF ITS PEOPLE. THIS IS A PROFOUNDLY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE WHO BASIC BALUES ARE DEEPLY INGRAINED. WE KNOW WHO WE ARE, PRESIDENT SAID, AND WHAT WE WANT TO DO. SUCH VALUES DEFINE NIGER'S QUOTE POLITICAL OPETIONS UNQUOTE. GOVERNMENT HAS ONE TAKS-- TO DEVELOP NIGER ECONOMICALLY.

7. NIGER'S DISTINCTIVENESS, ITS SPECIAL RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ITS SINGLEMINDED PURSUIT OF DEVELOPMENT GOALS MAKE FOR PROBLEMS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS WHO ARE DIFFERENT, OFTEN DO NOT SEE THINGS THE SAME WAY, AND SOMETIMES PURSUE MILITANT AND/OR DOCTRINAL GOALS. LOOKING AT HIS NEIGHBORS IN WEST AFRICA, PRESIDENT SAID THERE IS ONE BASIC FACT OF LIFE, THE WEIGHT AND IMPORTANCE OF NIGERIA. IN ALL SITUATIONS, NIGERIA HAS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY ANY GOVERNMENT OF NIGER, MILITARY, CIVILIAN OR WHATEVER. IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, NIGERIA WILL ALWAYS HAVE GREAT INFLUENCE ON WHAT NIGER DOES. BENIN THE PRESIDENT DESCRIBED AS CONSTANT IRRITATIION, WORRISOME TO NIGER FOR ITS APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO SERVE AS SPRINGBOARD FOR SOVIET ACTIVITIES. LIBYA IS A QUESTION MARK AND QADHAFI IS A HIGHLY UNPREDICTABLE ASSOCIATE. PRESIDENT SAID HE WAS UNCERTAIN OF QADHAFI'S MOTIVIATIONS BUT STRONG OPPOSITION TO COMMUNISM WAS ONE THING WHICH SEEMD TO BE CONSTANT IN QADHAFI'S BEHAVIOR OVER TIME. CHAD FOR ITS PART HAS TOUCHY INTERNAL SITUATION CASUED BY REBELLION. MALI SEEMS OPEN INCREASINGLY TO SOVIET PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE. ALGIANS HAVE STAKED OUT A CLEAR SOCIALIST PATH AND DO NOT HESITATE TO PRESCRIBE IT FOR COUNTRIES LIKE NIGER. EVEN IN UPPER VOLTA, INCREASINGLY FREE REIGH FOR TRADE UNIONISTS AND POLITICIANS RAISED SOME QUESTION MARKS ABOUT STABILITY THERE. ALL THIS, KOUNTCHE CONCLUDED, IS WORLD IN WHICH NIGER LIVES AND MAKES ITS FOREIGN

POLICY EXCEEDINGLY DELICATE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NIAMEY 5566

8.PRESIDENT THEN TURNED TO GREAT POWERS: US, CHINA
AND USSR. SOVIETS, HE SAID, ARE ALWAYS PROBING FOR
WEAK SPOTS, SEEKING POWER VACUUMS TO FILL. THEY ARE
MOVING IN ON LIBYA, HAVING LOST FOR NOW POSITION IN
EGYPT. AT SAME TIME, THEY HAVE CLEAR STRATEGIC
OBJECTIVES. IN THIS PART OF AFRICA IT IS TO GET A
FOOTHOLD IN NIGERIA. EVERYTHING ELSE THEY DO, THEIR
ACTIVITIES IN BENIN, THEIR MILITARY AID TO MALI, THEIR
EXCEEDINGLY ALREGE DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN OUAGADOUGOU,
THEIR PRESENCE IN CHAD-- HAVE AS OBJECTIVES THE
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ATTAINMENT OF DOMINANT POSITION IN NIGERIA.

9. CHINESE BY COMPARISON HAVE MORE MODEST PROGRAMS, ALTHOUGH THEIR EFFORT IN MOST CASES ARE MORE WORTH- WHILE FOR AFRICANS THAN WHAT SOVIETS ARE DOING. THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO COMPETE WITH SOVIETS WHENEVER AND WHEREVER LATTER ARE PRESENT. AT THIS JUNCTURE, CHINESE ARE LESS OF A THREAT. IN ADDITION, PRC IS GOING THROUGH PERIOD OF TRANSITION AND PERHAPS REASSESSMENT. IN ANY CASE, SO FAR, CHINESE, WHILE WIDELY PRESENT IN AFRICA, HAVE NOT MADE MAJOR IDEOLOGICAL PUSH. BUT IT IS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN, KOUNTCHE SIAD, THAT THIS WILL COME IN NEXT FEW YEARS, BUILDING ON POSITIONS CHINESE HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY REINFORCING.

10. NONE OF THIS SHOULD BE SURPRISING, PRESIDENT EXPLAINED. ALL COUNTRIES PURSUE THEIR INTERESTS. PROBLEM FROM POINT OF VIEW OF SMALL COUNTRY LIKE NIGER IS CONTROLLING COMPETITION, DRAWING MAXIMUM BENEFIT FROM IT, WHILE TRYING TO BALANCE VARIOUS INTERESTS INVOLVED. WESTERN COUNTRIES HAVE INTERESTS AS WELL WHICH ARE INCREASING IN NIGER. NINE SEPARATE COUNTRIES ARE INVOLVED IN THE URANIUM SECTOR, FOR EXAMPLE, NOT ONLY EUROPEANS, BUT JAPANESE, IRANIANS, AND SAUDIS, PLUS US. NIGER, WHICH HE BID IS NOW WORLD'S FOURTH LARGEST URANIUM EXPORTER, WELCOMES COOPERATION WITH ALL COUNTRIES PRESENT HERE ON BASIS OF ARMS-LENGTH DEALINGS AND FULL RESPECT FOR INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY OF NIGER.

11. PRESIDENT TURNED TO SOUTHERN AFRICA NOTING WITH SATISFACTION AND NO PERCEPTIBLE IMPATIENCE THAT RHODESIA WILL HAVE MAJORITY RULE WITHIN TWO YEARS. ANGOLA HE DESCRIBED AS SETTLED FOR BETTER OR WORSE. PRESIDENT SAID SOUTH AFRICA HAD TO BE SEEN BOTH FROM ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE. MANY COUNTRIES, CONFIDENTIAL

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HE SAID, INCLUDING AFRICANS, HAVE ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN SOUTH AFRICA. SUCH INTERESTS MAKE PRESSURE FROM ANY QUARTER ON VORSTER DOUBLY DIFFICULT AND AFRICANS WOULD HAVE TO RECOGNIZE THIS AS A FACT OF LIFE. SOUTH AFRICA MOREOVER HAS BEEN SETTLED FOR CENTURIES BY EUROPEANS AND THUS IT ESSENTIALLY A DIFFERENT KIND OF PROBLEM FROM RHODESIA OR EX-PORTUGUESE TERRITORIES. SOUTH AFRICA WOULD HAVE TO BE FACTORED OUT AND DEALT WITH SEPARATELY AS A HISTORICALLY SPECIAL AND LONGER-TERM PROBLEM. STRATEGICALLY WHAT IS INVOLVED IS THE CAPE ROUTE WHICH QUOTE THE WEST UNQUOTE WOULD HAVE TO

GUARANTEE IN EVENT OF MAJOR WORLD CONFLICT.

12. ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA, THERE ARE SOME TROUBLE SPOTS BUT THESE ARE OF LESSER MAGNITUDE THAN SOUTHERN AFRICA. DJIBOUTI AND TFAI IS A NAGGING ISSUE; PROBABLY IN THE LONG RUN SOMALIS WILL TAKE OVER WITH OBVIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR STABILITY OF ETHIOPIA. IN THIS ENDEAVOR, THEY WILL OF COURSE BE AIDED BY THE SOVIETS WHO ALREADY HAVE BASES IN YEMEN AND BERBERA. DJIBOUTI IS THE CORK IN THE BOTTLE WHICH SOVIETS WILL TRY TO REMOVE.

13. CLOSER TO HOME, THERE IS THE PUZZLE OF THE WESTERN SAHARA. PARAMETERS OF ISSUE ARE THAT ON ONE HAND MAURITANIANS AND MOROCCANS WILL NEVER LEAVE AND ON OTHER ALGERIANS WILL NEVER CEASE SUPPORT FOR POPULAR RESISTANCE MOVEMENT. ALGERIANS OF COURSE HAVE ECONOMIC STAKE AS WELL. THEY WANT THE PHOSPHATE AND ACCESS FOR EVENTUAL EXPORTS ALGERIAN IRON ORE DIRECT TO THE ATLANTIC. PRESIDENT SAID POLITICAL TACTIC ALGERIANS ARE PURSUING IS TO WEAN MAURITANIANS AWAY FROM MOROCCANS, BUT HE GAVE NO INDICATION WHEN HE THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE POSSIBLE OR WHO ISSUE COULD BE WORKED OUT. ALL HE KNEW WAS THAT ISSUE OF WESTERN SAHARA WOULD DRAG ON FOR A LONG TIME.

14. PRESIDENT CONCLUDED OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN PROBLEMS
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WITH OFFHAND MENTION OF MAYOTTE WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS A FRENCH DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEM PROVIDED BASICALLY BY UDR WHICH FRENCH, RATHER THAN AFRICANS, SHOULD HAVE GOOD SENSE TO RESOLVE.

15. FOREGOING, PRESIDENT SAID, IS AFRICA WITH WHICH NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION WILL HAVE TO DEAL. HE DESCRIBED U.S. POLICY OVER THE YEARS AS WELL INTENTIONED BUT TOO LONG ROOTED IN VIEW THAT AFRICA IS THE PRESERVE OF FRENCH AND BRITISH. WITH ANGOLA THERE HAS BEEN WELCOME CHANGES. HE SAID HE EXPECTED BASIC LINES OF POST-ANGOLA U.S. POLICY TO REMAIN INTACT. HOWEVER, HE ADDED HIS PERSONAL ASSESSMENT THAT THE STYLE OF U.S. POLICY WILL BE MORE ACTIVIST IN AFRICA WHILE MORE RIGID IN DEALING WITH SOVIETS ACROSS THE BOARD. PRESIDENT INDICATED THAT THIS KIND OF U.S. POSTURE WITH SOVIETS WOULD BE MOST WELCOME TO HIM AND SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED CUBA AS A CASE IN POINT. WHATEVER U.S. DID, IT WOULD BE CRITICIZED. THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE WITH THEIR GROWING INTERESTS ON THE CONTINENT WILL INSURE THAT, BUT U.S. SHOULD NOT BE DETERRED. THUS, SAID PRESIDENT, HIS MESSAGE IS THE SAME MESSAGE AS THAT OF HOUPHOUET, OF SENEGAL, OF KAUNDA, AND OF THE U.S.'S MANY OTHER AFRICAN FRIENDS: US SHOULD GIVE STRONG SUPPORT TO AFRICA FOR ECONOMIC

DEVELOPMENT. IF IT DOES SO, AFRICANS WILL TAKE CARE OF THEIR POLITICAL PROBLEMS THEMSELVES. THE CONTINENT IS RIVEN WITH QUOTE EGOSIMS UNQUOTE AND PRIVATE INTEREST BUT ALL AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAVE SAME FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS -- TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THEIR DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND NOT FALL BEHIND IN RACE FOR MODERNIZATION. COUNTRIES THAT HELP IN T IS PROCESS WILL HAVE AFRICA'S SUPPORT. IT'S A MAXIM OF POLITICAL LIFE THAT THOSE WHO HELP YOU MOST WILL BE YOUR FRIENDS.

16. COMMENT. MUCH OF WHAT PRESIDENT SAID HAS BEEN CONVEYED TO MY PREDECESSOR ON EARLIER OCCASIONS OR TO OTHER OBSERVERS. NEVERTHELESS, ON EVEN OF NIGER'S INDEPENDENCE
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DAY, AND AT TIME OF TRANSITION IN U.S., HE WAS CLEARLY MAKING A RENEWED APEAL FOR U.S. TO TAKE MORE INTEREST IN AFRICA AND EMPHASIZING HIS OWN RECEPTIVITY TO SUCH AN EFFORT. WHILE WE MAY DIFFER WITH SOME OF THE NUANCES OF HIS ANALYSIS, WE ARE CLEARLY DEALING WITH AN AFRICAN PRESIDENT WHO UNDERSTANDS THE MECHANICS OF POWER, WHO IS DEEPLY DISTURBED BY SOVIET AND CHINESE INROADS IN AFRICA, AND, WHILE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT RACIAL JUSTICE, IS ALMOST CLINCIALLY OBJECTIVE ABOUT SOLUTIONS TO SOUTHERN AFRICAN PROBLEMS. IN THE MONTHS AHEAD, IT WILL CERTAINLY BE IN OUR INTEREST TO REINFORCE OUR DIALOGUE AND STAND READY TO OFFER WHAT ASSISTANCE WE CAN TO A LEADERSHIP LIKE THIS WHCH SEES AFRICAN INTEREST AND THOSE OF THE U.S. AS MUTUALLY REINFORCING. WHAT STANDS OUT ABOUT KOUNTCHE MOST OF ALL IS HIS NATURAL INCLINATION TO WORK WITH THE U.S. AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES IN MOVING AFRICA IN A MODERATE DIRECTION. JAMES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, FOREIGN RELATIONS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NIAMEY05566
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760468-0009
From: NIAMEY
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761230/aaaaazrc.tel
Line Count: 367
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 MAR 2004 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <16 AUG 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TOUR D' HORIZON WITH PRESIDENT KOUNTCHE
TAGS: PFOR, EAID, NG, US, XA, (KOUNTCHE, SEYNI)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006